

AMENDMENT

Amendments to the Claims: Please replace all prior versions and listings of claims with the following listing of claims.

LISTING OF CLAIMS:

1-179. (Cancelled)

180. (Previously Presented) A method for detecting postage fraud using a unique mail piece indicium, comprising:

reading, at the United States Postal Service, a postage indicium located on a mail piece handled by the United States Postal Service, wherein the postage indicium contains a certificate serial number and a tracking identifier, the tracking identifier providing a mail piece tracking capability within the United States Postal Service;

transmitting a request to validate the postage indicium located on the mail piece from the United States Postal Service to a vendor-controlled postage-issuing computer system, wherein the request to validate the postage indicium includes the tracking identifier contained in the postage indicium located on the mail piece; and

receiving, at the United States Postal Service, data from the vendor-controlled postage-issuing computer system indicating whether the tracking identifier contained in the postage indicium matches any records in a transaction database that stores tracking identifiers contained in postage indicia located on mail pieces previously handled by the United States Postal Service, wherein the United States Postal Service submits the mail piece for normal delivery if the data received from the vendor-controlled postage-issuing computer system indicates that the tracking identifier contained in the postage indicium located on the mail piece does not match any of the records in the transaction database.

181. (Previously Presented) The method of claim 180, wherein the tracking identifier comprises a delivery confirmation code that provides the mail piece tracking capability within the United States Postal Service.

182. **(Previously Presented)** The method of claim 180, wherein the data received from the vendor-controlled postage-issuing computer system further represents one or more of an amount, a creation date and time, a service class, an optional data advance, or a delivery zip code associated with the postage indicium, and wherein the United States Postal Service does not submit the mail piece for the normal delivery if the data received from the vendor-controlled postage-issuing computer system does not match human-readable shipping information further located on the mail piece.

183. **(Previously Presented)** The method of claim 180, wherein the United States Postal Service does not submit the mail piece for the normal delivery if the tracking identifier contained in the postage indicium does not match a standard tracking identifier further located on the mail piece.

184. **(Previously Presented)** The method of claim 180, wherein the United States Postal Service does not submit the mail piece for the normal delivery if the data received from the vendor-controlled postage-issuing computer system indicates that the tracking identifier contained in the postage indicium located on the mail piece matches one or more of the records in the transaction database.

185. **(Previously Presented)** The method of claim 180, further comprising:

generating the tracking identifier at the United States Postal Service in response to receiving a tracking identifier request; and

sending the generated tracking identifier from the United States Postal Service, wherein the United States Postal Service generates and sends the tracking identifier in response to the tracking identifier request prior to reading the postage indicium located on the mail piece.

186. **(Previously Presented)** The method of claim 185, wherein the United States Postal Service receives the tracking identifier request from the vendor-controlled postage-issuing computer system and sends the generated tracking identifier to the vendor-controlled postage-issuing computer system in response to the tracking identifier request.

187. **(Currently Amended)** The method of claim 180, wherein the United States Postal Service scans a two-dimensional bar code further located on the mail piece to read the [[the]] postage indicium.

188. **(Previously Presented)** The method of claim 187, wherein the United States Postal Service obtains a meter number or an account number associated with the postage indicium in response to scanning the two-dimensional bar code.

189. **(Currently Amended)** The method of claim 187, wherein the United States Postal Service obtains the certificate serial number contained in the [[the]] postage indicium in response to scanning the two-dimensional bar code, and wherein the data received from the vendor-controlled postage-issuing computer system further verifies consistency between the certificate serial number contained in the postage indicium and a digital signature derived from the tracking identifier further contained in the postage indicium.

190. **(Currently Amended)** The method of claim 180, wherein the United States Postal Service scans a two-dimensional bar code further located on the mail piece to read the [[the]] postage indicium and obtain the tracking identifier contained in the postage indicium.

191. **(Previously Presented)** The method of claim 180, further comprising:

generating the tracking identifier at the United States Postal Service in response to receiving a tracking identifier request from the vendor-controlled postage-issuing computer system; and

sending the generated tracking identifier from the United States Postal Service to the vendor-controlled postage-issuing computer system, wherein the United States Postal Service generates and sends the tracking identifier to the vendor-controlled postage-issuing computer system in response to the tracking identifier request prior to reading the postage indicium located on the mail piece.

192. **(Previously Presented)** The method of claim 180, wherein the United States Postal Service scans a two-dimensional bar code further located on the mail piece to read the postage indicium and obtain a meter number distinct from the tracking identifier contained in the postage indicium.

193. **(Previously Presented)** The method of claim 180, wherein the United States Postal Service scans a two-dimensional bar code further located on the mail piece to read the postage indicium and obtain an account number distinct from the tracking identifier contained in the postage indicium.

194. **(Previously Presented)** The method of claim 180, wherein the United States Postal Service transmits the request to validate the postage indicium to the vendor-controlled postage-issuing computer system and receives the data from the vendor-controlled postage-issuing computer system over a network.

195. **(Previously Presented)** The method of claim 194, further comprising displaying the data received from the vendor-controlled postage-issuing computer system at the United States Postal Service.

196. **(Previously Presented)** The method of claim 195, further comprising verifying proof of payment for the postage indicium located on the mail piece from the data displayed at the United States Postal Service, wherein the United States Postal Service submits the mail piece for the normal delivery if the United States Postal Service verifies the proof of payment for the postage indicium with the displayed data.

197. **(Previously Presented)** The method of claim 195, wherein the data displayed at the United States Postal Service comprises an address for a sender of the mail piece.

198. **(Previously Presented)** A system for detecting postage fraud using a unique mail piece indicium, comprising:

- a computer system located at the United States Postal Service; and

- a network connection that links the computer system located at the United States Postal Service to a vendor-controlled postage-issuing computer system, wherein the computer system located at the United States Postal Service is configured to:

- read a postage indicium located on a mail piece handled by the United States Postal Service, wherein the postage indicium contains a certificate serial number and a tracking identifier, the tracking identifier providing a mail piece tracking capability within the United States Postal Service;

- transmit a request to validate the postage indicium located on the mail piece to the vendor-controlled postage-issuing computer system, wherein the request to validate the postage indicium includes the tracking identifier contained in the postage indicium located on the mail piece; and

- receive data from the vendor-controlled postage-issuing computer system indicating whether the tracking identifier contained in the postage indicium matches any records in a transaction database that stores tracking identifiers contained in postage indicia located on mail pieces previously handled by the United States Postal Service, wherein the United States Postal Service submits the mail piece for normal delivery if the data received from the vendor-controlled postage-issuing computer

system indicates that the tracking identifier contained in the postage indicium located on the mail piece does not match any of the records in the transaction database.

199. **(Previously Presented)** The system of claim 198, wherein the tracking identifier comprises a delivery confirmation code that provides the mail piece tracking capability within the United States Postal Service.

200. **(Previously Presented)** The system of claim 198, wherein the data received from the vendor-controlled postage-issuing computer system further represents one or more of an amount, a creation date and time, a service class, an optional data advance, or a delivery zip code associated with the postage indicium, and wherein the United States Postal Service does not submit the mail piece for the normal delivery if the data received from the vendor-controlled postage-issuing computer system not matching human-readable shipping information further located on the mail piece.

201. **(Previously Presented)** The system of claim 198, wherein the United States Postal Service does not submit the mail piece for the normal delivery if the tracking identifier contained in the postage indicium does not match a standard tracking identifier further located on the mail piece.

202. **(Previously Presented)** The system of claim 198, wherein the United States Postal Service does not submit the mail piece for the normal delivery if the data received from the vendor-controlled postage-issuing computer system indicates that the tracking identifier contained in the postage indicium located on the mail piece matches one or more of the records in the transaction database.

203. **(Previously Presented)** The system of claim 198, wherein the computer system located at the United States Postal Service is further configured to:

generate the tracking identifier in response to receiving a tracking identifier request;
and

send the generated tracking identifier over the network connection, wherein the computer system located at the United States Postal Service is configured to generate and send the tracking identifier in response to the tracking identifier request prior to reading the postage indicium located on the mail piece.

204. **(Previously Presented)** The system of claim 203, wherein the computer system located at the United States Postal Service is configured to receive the tracking identifier request from the vendor-controlled postage-issuing computer system and send the generated tracking identifier to the vendor-controlled postage-issuing computer system over the network connection in response to the tracking identifier request.

205. **(Currently Amended)** The system of claim 198, wherein the United States Postal Service scans a two-dimensional bar code further located on the mail piece to read the [[the]] postage indicium.

206. **(Previously Presented)** The system of claim 205, wherein the United States Postal Service obtains a meter number or an account number associated with the postage indicium in response to scanning the two-dimensional bar code.

207. **(Currently Amended)** The system of claim 205, wherein the United States Postal Service obtains the certificate serial number contained in the [[the]] postage indicium in response to scanning the two-dimensional bar code, and wherein the data received from the vendor-controlled postage-issuing computer system further verifies consistency between the certificate serial number contained in the postage indicium and a digital signature derived from the tracking identifier further contained in the postage indicium.

208. **(Currently Amended)** The system of claim 198, wherein the United States Postal Service scans a two-dimensional bar code further located on the mail piece to read the [[the]] postage indicium and obtain the tracking identifier contained in the postage indicium.

209. **(Previously Presented)** The system of claim 198, wherein the computer system located at the United States Postal Service is further configured to:

generate the tracking identifier in response to receiving a tracking identifier request from the vendor-controlled postage-issuing computer system; and

send the generated tracking identifier to the vendor-controlled postage-issuing computer system over the network connection, wherein the computer system located at the United States Postal Service is configured to generate and send the tracking identifier to the vendor-controlled postage-issuing computer system in response to the tracking identifier request prior to reading the postage indicium located on the mail piece.

210. **(Previously Presented)** The system of claim 198, wherein the United States Postal Service scans a two-dimensional bar code further located on the mail piece to read the postage indicium and obtain a meter number distinct from the tracking identifier contained in the postage indicium.

211. **(Previously Presented)** The system of claim 198, wherein the United States Postal Service scans a two-dimensional bar code further located on the mail piece to read the postage indicium and obtain an account number distinct from the tracking identifier contained in the postage indicium.

212. **(Previously Presented)** The system of claim 198, wherein the computer system located at the United States Postal Service is configured to transmit the request to validate the postage indicium to the vendor-controlled postage-issuing computer system and receive the data from the vendor-controlled postage-issuing computer system over the network connection.

213. **(Previously Presented)** The system of claim 212, wherein the computer system located at the United States Postal Service is further configured to display the data received from the vendor-controlled postage-issuing computer system.

214. **(Previously Presented)** The system of claim 213, wherein the United States Postal Service verifies proof of payment for the postage indicium located on the mail piece from the data displayed at the computer system located at the United States Postal Service, wherein the United States Postal Service submits the mail piece for the normal delivery if the United States Postal Service verifies the proof of payment for the postage indicium with the displayed data.

215. **(Previously Presented)** The system of claim 213, wherein the data displayed at the computer system located at the United States Postal Service comprises an address for a sender of the mail piece.

216. **(Previously Presented)** The system of claim 198, wherein the United States Postal Service further assumes that the postage indicium located on the mail piece has not been fraudulently duplicated if the data received from the vendor-controlled postage-issuing computer system indicates that the tracking identifier contained therein does not match any of the records in the transaction database.

217. **(Previously Presented)** The method of claim 180, wherein the United States Postal Service further assumes that the postage indicium located on the mail piece has not been fraudulently duplicated if the data received from the vendor-controlled postage-issuing computer system indicates that the tracking identifier contained therein does not match any of the records in the transaction database.